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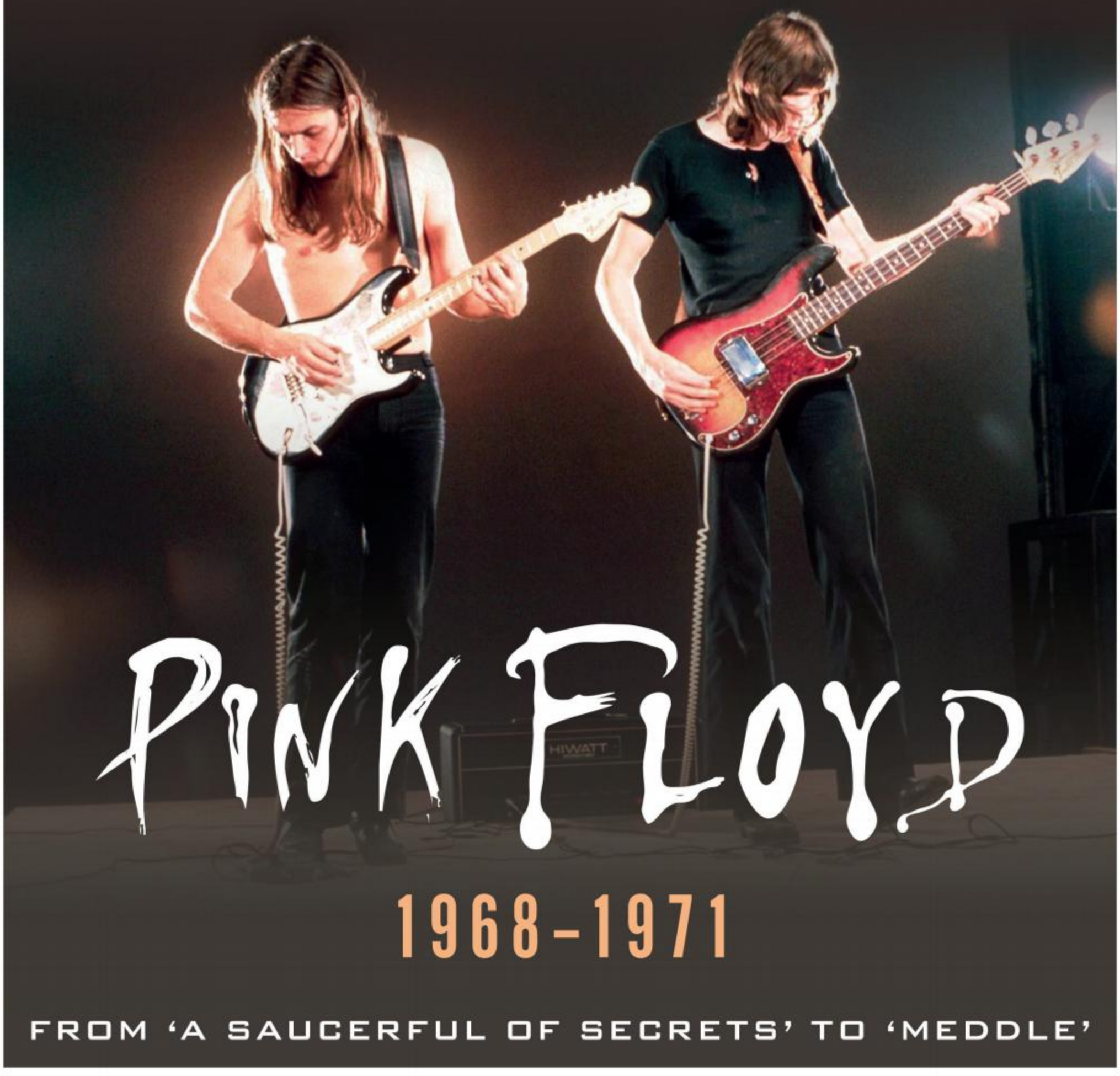

PINK FLOYD

1968–1971

FROM 'A SAUCERFUL OF SECRETS' TO 'MEDDLE'

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Chapter 1

A SAUCERFUL OF SECRETS

In 1968 change was on the horizon for Pink Floyd, they had lost the driving force of the band – the brilliant Syd Barrett, and entered the Abbey Road Studios to record their second album with trepidation.

This record was *A Saucerful of Secrets*, an album that included Barrett's final contribution to their discography, *Jugband Blues*. Waters began to develop his own songwriting, contributing *Set the Controls for the Heart of the Sun*, *Let There Be More Light* and *Corporal Clegg*. Wright composed *See-Saw* and *Remember a Day*. The band's producer Norman Smith encouraged them to self-produce their music, and they recorded demos of new material at their houses.

With Smith's instruction at Abbey Road, they learned how to use the recording studio to realise their artistic vision. However, Smith remained unconvinced by their music, and when Mason struggled to perform his drum part on *Remember a Day*, Smith stepped in as his replacement. These were just some of the issues the band had faced during the creation of *A Saucerful of Secrets*, but the band rallied to produce a unique album that marks an important juncture in the band's history.

Despite its many limitations, on the whole *A Saucerful of Secrets*, the first album recorded by the post-Barrett Floyd, actually represented a step forward in most respects. The album did not sell as well as its predecessor but still reached a healthy number nine in the album charts. This slight dip in sales is possibly because the pop sensibilities of *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn* were increasingly buried under layers of avant-garde experimentation as Floyd began to grasp their way towards the sound which would make them world-beaters. Highlights of the album include *Set the Controls for the Heart of the Sun* and the *Celestial Voices* section of the title track. Simple straight formal numbers such as *Jugband Blues* and *Corporal Clegg* now seem slightly out of place as the main emphasis is clearly on the instrumental heavyweights.

For this album released on 1 July 1968, Norman Smith was moved upstairs to become Executive Producer as the band increasingly sought to control their own destiny in the studio. The results are definitely patchy but there are enough pointers as to where Floyd would go in future to make it worth checking out. New boy Gilmour would later explain how he remembered Waters and Mason drawing the album's title track as an architectural diagram, in dynamic rather than musical forms, with peaks and troughs!

Most of the recording had taken place before the arrival of Gilmour and there is now some debate as to who played what on the album. The uncertainties over the album were not helped by the changing roles behind the scenes. Blackhill chose to abandon Floyd

in favour of managing Barrett and in April 1967 the Bryan Morrison Agency took over the management of the band. Besides *Jug Band Blues* Barrett himself later recalled that he had played only on *Remember a Day*. Gilmour's role in the group was still very tenuous and he is credited only with writing quarter of the track, *A Saucerful of Secrets*. It's safe to assume that his is the guitar on the rest of the material although Gilmour himself stated that for the first few months he was so 'paranoid' over his status that he limited himself to merely playing rhythm.

A track-by-track review of

A Saucerful of Secrets

Released 29 June 1968

A Saucerful of Secrets was the first sleeve to be designed under the auspices of the Hipgnosis partnership. Hipgnosis were formed by Storm Thorgerson and Aubrey 'po' Powell. Storm and Roger Waters had also played together in the same school rugby team. The services of the Hipgnosis partnership were not exclusive to Floyd and the design partnership went on to produce some of the most innovative and distinctive record sleeves of the seventies. This early effort produced a more distinctive identity for the *Saucerful* album than the undistinguished *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn* sleeve but there was still very little to suggest the superb work which was yet to come.

Let There Be More Light (Waters)

Opens the album, an hypnotic, slow opening piece with a quirky time signature which signals a return to the cosmic space-rock direction Pink Floyd would now make their own. Roger Waters was always very cynical about the sci-fi tag that the transitional line-up were given. Perhaps this is why later material moved to deal almost

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'I think there are ideas contained there that we have continued to use all the way through our career. I think [it] was a quite good way of marking Syd's departure and Dave's arrival. It's rather nice to have it on one record, where you get both things. It's a cross-fade rather than a cut.'

– Nick Mason on *A Saucerful of Secrets*

exclusively with down-to-earth inner space themes of personality disorder.

Remember a Day (Wright)

A light weight throw away Rick Wright song about childhood. Like much of his early material this track wraps up incidents in his life in snapshot form. Childhood and the growing-up process was to become a much-used theme by the band.

Set the Controls for the Heart of the Sun (Waters)

An altogether stronger effort, a number that became a favourite in Floyd live sets in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This Roger Waters song was characterised by the slow build to the psychedelic crescendo that had first appeared on *Interstellar Overdrive* and was destined to become something of a Floyd hallmark. The song took its name from a line in a William S Burroughs novel and the whispered verses came from a book of Chinese poetry. Burroughs' cut-up techniques had been a big influence on the now departed Barrett. A particularly fine example of the piece in a live setting appeared in the BBC 2 documentary *All You Need Is Love*.

Corporal Clegg (Waters)

The track which follows is in marked contrast to the spacey atmosphere we have just explored. This is a wacky Roger Waters number full of sarcastic humour. Waters' father had been killed during World War II at Anzio and this event would influence Roger's later writing as he became more obsessed with the obscenity of systematised violence and the pointlessness of war in later material which, ultimately emerges in all it's fully formed bitterness as *The Final Cut*.

A Saucerful of Secrets (Waters/Wright/Mason/Gilmour)

A distinct shift in style once more with *A Saucerful of Secrets*.

Originally entitled *The Massed Gadgets of Hercules*, this was a sequence of pieces that had various sources. It contains no lyrics. The opening *Something Else* had already been used by the band at the Games for May concert, as part of the opener *Tape Dawn* – heavily treated cymbals that produced a series of tones. The next section, *Syncopated Pandemonium*, features a loop of Mason's drumming on top of which Gilmour adds guitar sounds. The maelstrom of the third part, *Storm Signal*, is pure white noise and electronics before the soothing *Celestial Voices*, with its fugue-like organ and heavenly vocal harmonies. The piece suggests four stages of human development – birth, adulthood, death and re-birth.

See-Saw (Wright)

After the challenging dynamics of *Saucerful* comes one of the albums less auspicious tracks written by Rick Wright. Its working title says it all: *The Most Boring Song I've Ever Heard Bar Two!* As its author Rick Wright later noted of all his early Floyd contributions: 'They're sort of an embarrassment. I don't think I've listened to them ever since we recorded them. It was a learning process. I learned that I'm not a lyric writer, for example. But you have to try it before you find out.'

Jugband Blues (Barrett)

The final track on the album. Sadly it was also Syd Barrett's last recorded contribution to the band he'd started. This forlorn piece has been accurately described by former manager Peter Jenner as 'possibly the ultimate self-diagnosis on a state of schizophrenia.' Syd was in bad shape, and this is a sad and simultaneously scathing portrait of his relationship with the Floyd during winter 1967. It directly addresses the drying-up of his song writing, the demands he felt his band mates, managers and record label were placing on him, and an appearance on *Top of the Pops*! The inclusion of the Salvation Army brass section whom Barrett dragged into the studio and

OLGA

'I am one of the best five writers to come out of English music since the War.'
– Roger Waters

invited to perform without scores adds to the sense of anarchy; it is a total rejection of commercialism and conformity.

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Despite all of the problems, on the whole, press reaction to *A Saucerful of Secrets* was favourable. One of the journalists who reviewed the album was underground stalwart and Pink Floyd aficionado Miles, his review was published in the 'head' magazine *International Times* on 8 August 1968. 'The Floyd have developed a distinctive sound for themselves, the result of experiments with new "electronic" techniques in live performance. However, the result of most of these experiments was presented particularly well on their first album; there is little new here. The electronic collage on *Jugband Blues*, though it uses stereo well, has been done much better by the United States of America. The unimaginative use of a strings arrangement spoils See Saw. The use of electronic effects on *A Saucerful of Secrets* is poorly handled and does not add up to music. It is too long, too boring and totally uninventive, particularly when compared to a similar electronic composition such as *Metamorphosis* by Vladimir Ussachevsky, which was done in 1957, eleven years ago. The introduction of drums doesn't help either and just reminds me of the twelve and a half minute unfinished backing track *The Return of the Son of Monster Magnet* which somehow got onto side four of The Mothers of Invention's *Freak Out* album, much to Zappa's horror and which was left off the British version. In the same way as bad sitar playing is initially attractive, electronic music turns people on at first – then as one hears more, the listener demands that something be made and done with these "new" sounds, something more than "psychedelic mood music". *Let There Be More Light* presents the Floyd at their best as does most of side one. They are really good at this and outshine all the pale imitations of their style. With their *Saucers* track, experiments have a historical place and

should be preserved, but only the results should be on record, at least until they bring out one a month and are much cheaper. A record well worth buying!'

In addition to the album the new look Floyd made a couple of attempts to re-ignite their career as a singles chart act. The first stab at making a return to the charts was *It Would Be So Nice* – (Wright) released in April 1968. Looking back this is a big embarrassment... this unremarkable Richard Wright composition starts out promisingly but it's novelty style chorus did nothing to change the fortunes of the band in the singles charts and the group soon disowned the single. On 18 May 1968 *Melody Maker* published an interview with Nick Mason and Roger Waters, which explored the difficult relationship between Pink Floyd and the singles charts. Mason was first to explain 'It is possible on an LP to do exactly what we want to do. The last single *Apples and Oranges*, we had to hustle a bit. It was commercial, but we could only do it in two sessions. We prefer to take a longer time. Singles are a funny scene. Some people are prepared to be persuaded into anything. I suppose it depends on if you want to be a mammoth star or not.' Roger Waters expanded on the difficulty of producing a hit single in the context of the Floyd's album output 'Live bookings seem to depend on whether or not you have a record in the Top Ten. I don't like *It Would Be So Nice*. I don't like the song or the way it's sung. Singles releases have something to do with our scene, but they are not overwhelmingly essential. On LPs, we can produce our best at any given time.' Mason added, 'a whole scene has gone. Light-shows have gone well out of fashion, but if people still like them, there must be something in it.'

Point Me at the Sky released in December 1968 met with an equal lack of success, small wonder really, as neither the songs chosen for single release are really up to scratch as potential chart contenders. The promotional film for *Point Me at the Sky* kept up the Floyd tradition of half-hearted film making. Grabbing a plane and shooting off some film may have been considered acceptable in

1968 but there was no great forethought or any sense of real film making craft on display, the results are uninspired photo-journalism. The days of the applied use of the language of film in Pink Floyd's promotional films and stage shows still lay far in the future.

Interestingly the B-sides of both of the later singles proved better than the A-sides. *It Would Be So Nice* was backed by the evocative *Julia Dream*. Originally called *Doreen's Dream*, this Roger Waters song mined the same kind of flower-power sound that, a year before, had been fresh and innovative, but which now was beginning to sound stale and clichéd. It was however the first Pink Floyd arrangement to be properly recorded with Dave Gilmour on guitar.

The lack lustre *Point Me at the Sky* was backed by *Careful with That Axe* which was to become a stage favourite for the next four years. Here was a track that showed the way forward and which, in various forms, was to become a staple of their live show for years to come. Ultimately the piece would develop into a perfect example of the Floyd's sound scapes, all textures and moods with Gilmour's whispered 'words' and that bloodcurdling scream. *Careful with That Axe, Eugene* was also known as *Murderistic Woman* and *Keep Smiling People*.

Interviewed by *Record Mirror* on 21 September 1968 Roger Waters and David Gilmour seemed happy over the progress of the band without the need to chase success in the singles charts as Waters said. 'We're not making our fortunes, but we're doing all right. We can survive by playing the kind of music, and recording the kind of LPs, that we like. And there are enough customers to make it worthwhile.' Gilmour continued the upbeat thread, 'We're beginning to find that we're booked on concerts, particularly on the continent, where we get top billing over famous groups that we looked up to as the big stars when we were starting. It's not easy to adjust to this. We keep thinking there must be some embarrassing mistake.'

Chapter 2

MORE

If it was an uphill struggle to re-establish the group's credibility in the aftermath of Syd's departure, one possible option to solving their short term economic problems and also establishing some much needed credibility in the process was to produce film scores. The band had always embraced film as a medium of expression and during the Barrett era the group had contributed music to films such as *The Committee* and *Tonight Let's All Make Love in London*. Certainly the sounds they were now making lent themselves effortlessly to the moving image. At a time when most groups did not dream of using film as a promotional tool The Pink Floyd had also had the foresight to

understand the need for promotional films hence the Derek Nice directed *Arnold Layne*.

In the main interview at the time Rick Wright expanded at length on the subject. 'We're going more and more into films, doing film music. We've always wanted to get into that, and now it's beginning to happen for us. We did the music for *More*, and that's doing well abroad. It's supposed to be the most popular film in Paris at the moment. In the beginning, it was important for us to play to earn money, gigging all over the country. But now we're trying to work things out film-wise. It's a good way of working because it leaves us a lot more time than if we had to travel all over the country every night, and we can go into other things. It'll leave us more time for recording and writing. We want to release a lot more albums than we have done in the past. We'd like to do more concerts rather than straight club venues. Eventually, we'd like to make our own films. Doing the music for films is a very challenging thing. It means that we have to express facts and scenes in music. And, as I say, financially it pays off, and so it leaves us more time on our own to develop our own individual ideas. Gigs take up so much time, and they're very hard work. I'm not saying that gigs aren't satisfying. We'd never give up playing clubs. There's a good feeling when you're playing to an audience in a small environment.'

The much needed work on the film score for *More* had materialised when Barbet Schroeder, who'd worked with French New Wave director Jean Luc Goddard, asked the band to score his debut feature, More. The film was already completed and edited and just needed music. For the reasons set out by Wright, the band readily agreed. Money aside, the band accepted the commission because they reckoned the film also projected the right message about drugs and the band were never particularly drug-orientated, especially after Barrett's departure. The film follows the fortunes of a beautiful junkie princess played by Mimsey Farmer who draws German drifter Klaus Grunberg into her sunny world of

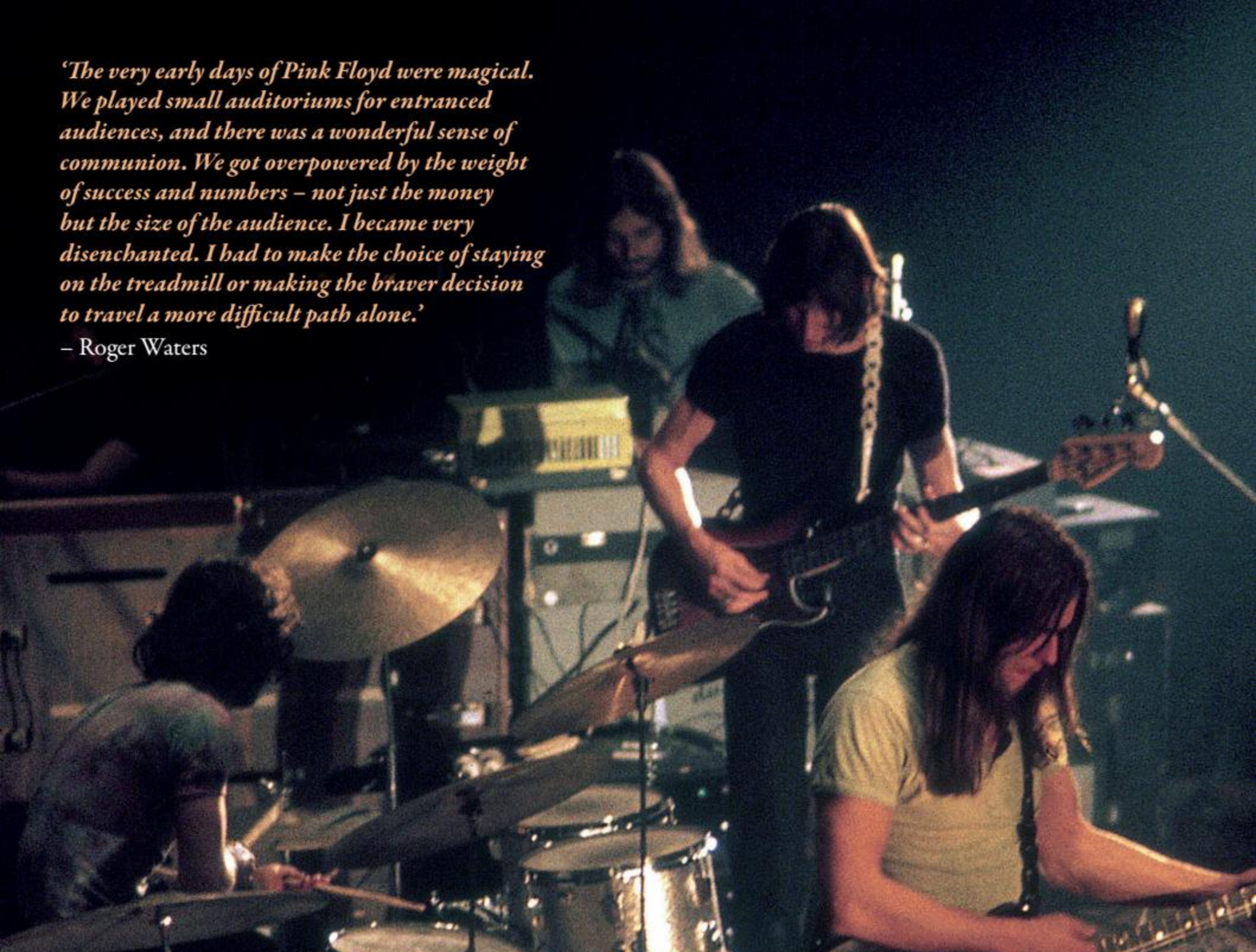
Mediterranean beach parties, retired Nazis and heroin pushers. The music is far better than the film, which is pretty lame.

Fortunately the band's fortunes did not rest too much on the success or otherwise of the film. Although Floyd wrote the new material ostensibly for the movie, the resulting material from the soundtrack was also worked into the live act. Many of these became integrated pieces in the highly ambitious live show that the band continued to develop during 1969. The live show was titled The Man and The Journey (The Massed Gadgets of Auximenes... More Furious Madness from Pink Floyd) and had by now expanded into a lengthy suite which also borrowed from earlier numbers such as *Pow R Toc H* and most importantly *A Saucerful of Secrets*.

The beautiful instrumental *Quicksilver*, for example, which was written for the acid trip part of *More*, was now fitted into the first half of this live show as *Sleeping*, while *Up The Khyber* was used as the part of the live suite that chronicled the act of copulation. *Cymbaline* (the first expression of Roger Waters' disillusionment with the music business) became *Nightmare*. *Green Is the Colour* was incorporated as the opening of *The Journey*, though its second verse refers directly to heavy drug use by Estelle, the heroine in the film.

Unusually for a film soundtrack there were a large number of songs in addition to the expected mood pieces. As well as being incorporated into the Auximines suite both *Green Is the Colour* and *Cymbaline* became staples of the live set over 1970 and 1971 and both were performed for the cameras of KQED in 1970.

Recorded over a very short period of time in early 1969, the album exhibits all of the disadvantages that would suggest, nonetheless *More* did yield a few stand out tracks in the form of *Cirrus Minor*, *Cymbaline* and *The Nile Song* all of which were excellent examples of the increasing confidence in writing and recording within the band. On the whole it is unfair to judge the soundtrack albums by the same standards as the studio albums. It was never intended for albums like More to be representative of the band's regular output.



'The very early days of Pink Floyd were magical. We played small auditoriums for entranced audiences, and there was a wonderful sense of communion. We got overpowered by the weight of success and numbers – not just the money but the size of the audience. I became very disenchanted. I had to make the choice of staying on the treadmill or making the braver decision to travel a more difficult path alone.'

– Roger Waters

The short time scales over which the album was recorded really shows in compositions like the lacklustre *More Blues* which was certainly not destined to become a Floyd classic.

A track-by-track review of

More

Released 13 June 1969

The second sleeve from the Hipgnosis stable was for the soundtrack to the film More. This was another unspectacular effort which simply took a still from the film as its subject and polarised the image to produce this odd cover with a strange orange sky.

Cirrus Minor (Waters)

The album opens with *Cirrus Minor* a woozy acoustic gentle mannered piece which uses recorded birdsong. This is one of the earliest examples of the musique concrête motif that cropped up regularly in Pink Floyd music over the next twenty years.

The Nile Song (Waters)

Next up is *The Nile Song*, a very atypical composition with Gilmour's heavy metal guitar and aggressive vocal pre-dating the vocal styles of grunge and garage and nu-metal which would not arrive on the scene until twenty years later. In the film this piece appears as a background piece in heavily compressed form which suggests that it is being played back on a record player during the party. There is no connection with the Nile in the film.

Crying Song (Waters)

After the fury of *The Nile Song* we come to a complete contrast. *Crying Song* is a return to the gentle dreamy territory driven by the

keyboard from Rick Wright and heralds a soft acoustic number, which deliberately follows an unexpected melodic and acoustic line, but not terribly successfully.

Up the Khyber (Wright/Mason)

Another unsuccessful number was *Up the Khyber*. Nick Mason's distinctly un-jazzy drums and stabbed jazz chords from Rick Wright combine to little effect before the organ attempts to engage our flagging interest with equally limited success.

Green Is the Colour (Waters)

A folk tinged acoustic number which buries Gilmour's tentative vocal in the middle of a muddy cluttered mix. The amateurish tin whistle fails to convince and neither does Rick Wright's piano solo.

Cymbeline (Waters)

Fortunately the next track, *Cymbaline* arrives just in time to lift the quality of the album. A fine example of the quieter more reflective side of Pink Floyd with a memorable and uplifting chorus, *Cymbaline* is justifiably regarded as one of the four stand-out tracks on the album. With more time, care and attention this track could really have been developed into something special.

The Party Sequence (Waters/Wright/Mason/Gilmour)

A very short percussion interlude which heralds the grandly entitled *Main Theme*. Disconcerting cymbals and organ set the mood for the arrival of the mysterious *Main Theme* featuring a typically Floydian rhythm track and a melody line that pre-dates Jean Michele Jarre, but contains much that later characterised his work. A real gem that is often sadly overlooked.

Ibiza Bar (Waters/Wright/Mason/Gilmour)

A short variation on the theme first heard in *The Nile Song* and

treads very similar ground. The production here is muddy and feels especially hurried.

More Blues (Waters/Wright/Mason/Gilmour)
On *More Blues* trademark guitar from Gilmour introduces a slow blues which threatens, but never quite develops into a full fledged blues work out. The blues soon disappear into a layer of weird sonic effects, avant-garde gongs and discordant keyboards, which are the main feature of the piece.

Spanish Piece (Gilmour)
Next up is *Spanish Piece* which features interesting Spanish guitar flourishes from Gilmour underneath a layer of spoken words.

Dramatic Theme (Waters/Mason/Wright/Gilmour)
The album concludes with *Dramatic Theme*. An unsettling Waters bass line introduces a more recognisable Floyd back in firm melodic/ instrumental territory before the track peters out like so many that have gone before. An undistinguished end to an undistinguished album.

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The *More* album was not terribly well received by the critics – reserved is probably the best word to describe the overall reaction. This review in the *The Record Song Book* published on 1 August 1969 is atypical in its enthusiasm for the album. 'Pink Floyd were commissioned to compose the musical score for the film *More*, shown at the Cannes Film Festival recently. The film was directed by Barbet Schroeder and stars Mimsi Farmer and Klaus Grunberg. All thirteen titles on the original soundtrack recording were composed and played by the group. The music is sometimes purely instrumental, sometimes both instrumental and vocal, always

extremely interesting and arresting. Quite weird in parts too. Try the *Main Theme* on Side Two, for an example. But it's not all like this. There's a super little Spanish bit that sounds almost traditional and there are other equally contrasting tracks. They did a great job.'

Chapter 3

UMMAGUMMA

***Ummagumma* (pronounced Ooma-gooma) is a difficult album to rationalise. It's a strange hybrid double album that features an album's worth of live recording and a whole studio album on which each of the four members contribute unique individual pieces.**

The opportunity to write and produce each of the four pieces was in theory divided among the four contributors (although it is interesting to note that even in 1969 Roger contributed two pieces compared to the others, who got one each). On 15 February 1969 while the album was still at the recording stage Nick Mason met with *Disc and Music Echo* for a progress report, at this stage

it's interesting to note that there was still some uncertainty as to whether the album would be a double or a single. The idea of using live recordings does not seem to have presented itself at this stage. 'It's our usual annual album, but it is quite an elaborate affair. What we've agreed to do is take a quarter of the album each, on which we can all do the things we really want to do. It's hard to say what's going to come out of it at the moment, because everyone's being incredibly secretive about their bit till they've got it all together. I've done my quarter twice over. The difficulty is, doing something so totally egocentric as this, you keep wanting to go back and do something completely different. There's still hope we could do our quarters on one album, and on the other have one side of straight songs and one side of a major work involving all of us.'

In the studio at least, the band were definitely struggling for ideas. Roger Water's *Several Species of Small Furry Animals Gathered Together in a Cave and Grooving With a Pict* was a great title for a musical joke, but it was a joke that unfortunately lacked any kind of a punch line. The overall weakness of the studio album is amply demonstrated by the fact that *Grantchester Meadows* is arguably the best of the studio tracks. The piece is gentle and pleasant, but it lacks a stand out melody or the innovative instrumental flourish that marked out the later Floyd from the rest of the world. With this track we are reaching the end of the pastoral era of Pink Floyd which flowered briefly with tracks like *The Scarecrow* and ends with the gentle wistful melodies of *If* and *Fat Old Sun* on *Atom Heart Mother*. Although the song marks the end of an era in that particular sense, the prominent use of sound effects again looks forward to the future of Pink Floyd.

Those who viewed the band as serious space-rock explorers believed the title was inspired by Frank Herbert's hugely popular sci-fi epic *Dune*, but the real story couldn't have been more down to earth – it was simply local Cambridge slang for sex.

Retrospectively the album has been described as a 'disaster' by Roger Waters; and who are we to argue? The prospects of a possible débâcle were always there from the moment it was decided to allocate half a side of one disc to each member. The rather indulgent studio experiments of the studio album definitely sit uncomfortably against the excellent live recordings on the first disc. Overall the experiment strays too far towards free form instrumental exploration without enough of the melodic counterpoint which was to make the next album so successful.

By April 1969 when *Beat Instrumental* came calling Nick Mason was still full of enthusiasm for the *Ummagumma* album which the band had begun hard on the heels of the *More* sessions.

'We've just completed the music for a film, which we did in a week, really hard at it, but we are working on an album which will be split into four quarters, each one of us doing what he wants on his piece. Mine, naturally, will be purely percussion and very much stereo orientated, using a wide range of instruments. If you can hit it, I might use it. I have tried to hang it together, it has movements and so forth, a construction. Few drum solos move me on record and I'm not as good as many other drummers, so it would be pointless for me to hammer away as fast as I can for ten minutes. There is a problem here, though. *Saucerful* was more than just the sum of the four of us. It was us and what we make together, which is more. We would like the new album to be a double one, with half of it live or semi-live, us as a group. This would then show both what we can do together, and what each of us can do individually.' Individually there was not a great deal to show and the only piece which still survives on film from the time is a short snippet of promotional film featuring Rick Wright's Sysyphus.

In November of 1969 *Disc and Music Echo* interviewed David Gilmour on the progress of the band to date. It's interesting to read between the lines of the piece which dealt with the creation of new Pink Floyd pieces in the aftermath of the *Ummagumma*

debacle. The reader gets the clear impression that Pink Floyd had still not found a strong musical direction in the studio and were to an extent drifting along hoping to find the muse from somewhere. 'I don't know how it's going to go. It's tended to get a little less spacey lately. It's just a matter of doing new things, new pieces of music, and seeing what happens. You can have an idea, then, when the whole group gets together, it will change completely. How a song is originally, and how it eventually turns out, may be two different things. The group has changed a lot since the early days, and come a long way. The worst period was after the two hit singles. We went right down then because people expected us to do them and we wouldn't. Now we are as busy as we want to be. We do two or three gigs a week and that keeps us going. But I never seem to have any cash. It's such an expensive business. We are also a bit slow, especially on recording. It takes us months to get out an LP. We get in the studio for a couple of days, then someone like the Beatles wants to record and we get shoved out. So a couple of weeks later we go back and we've forgotten the mood. It takes a lot of time getting back into the thing. What we really need is a block session to get something done in one go. We have great fun in the studio mucking about. But I don't think I could go on recording without doing appearances. It's great to do a live gig, but we can do so much more recording. I don't see why we should limit ourselves on record to what we do on stage. There are a lot of things we haven't really touched on yet, television, for instance, which is good publicity. We have been approached about doing programs, but nothing's ever come of it. I thought we had some nice ideas for a TV show, they'd probably still be OK. But TV generally is so boring. I suppose everybody's ego would be satisfied by a lot of fame, but it seems that if you have a record in the charts, you are rejected by the so-called underground movement. Hit parades do spell death for our sort of group. But if we did a single, I'd be quite happy if it got into the charts.'

A track-by-track review of

Ummagumma

Released 7 November 1969

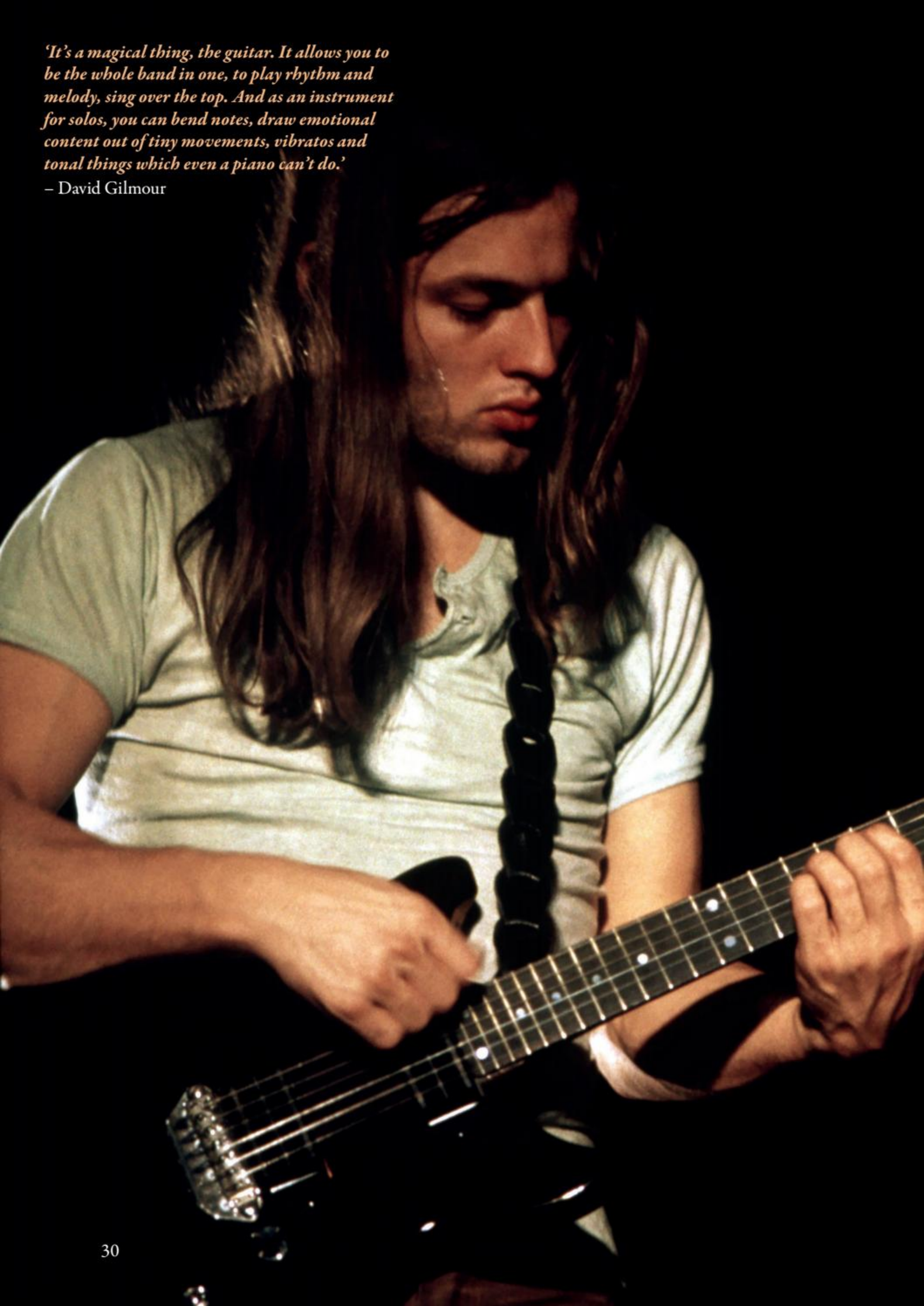
The Hipgnosis partnership really began to find its stride with this brilliant sleeve which was striking, thought provoking and innovative with its clever handling of the theme of infinite regression. In many respects the quality of the sleeve may have been somewhat in advance of the music which lagged behind the creativity of the artwork department. The image on the reverse of the sleeve with all of the bands equipment arranged to suggest the shape of a menacing military craft or possibly the spaceship which was destined to crash into the heart of the sun on the live album, is especially memorable.

Astronomy Domine (Barrett)

The live album opens strongly with *Astronomy Domine* which was one of Barrett's strongest compositions. At the time Waters and Gilmour had just produced the final sessions for Syd's first solo album and it was fitting that Syd's song was still a staple in the Pink Floyd set at this time and played perfectly into the preconceived audience expectations of a band which played 'music of the spheres'!

Careful with That Axe, Eugene (Waters/Wright/Mason/Gilmour)

The second track on the live album. On stage the band had transformed this rather unpromising material, which had first appeared a year previously. No longer a humble half forgotten B-side – *Careful with That Axe* had become a central part of the live show and the Floyd really began to develop the piece to its limits. An extended studio cut was later used to stunning effect to enhance the climactic scenes of Antonioni's Zabriskie Point in which a building exploded over and over again to it's unearthly strains. *Careful with*



'It's a magical thing, the guitar. It allows you to be the whole band in one, to play rhythm and melody, sing over the top. And as an instrument for solos, you can bend notes, draw emotional content out of tiny movements, vibratos and tonal things which even a piano can't do.'
– David Gilmour

That Axe was something of a workhouse for Floyd at this time. The same number, re-titled *Beset by Creatures of the Deep*, had also been incorporated into concerts as part of The Man and The Journey opus.

Set the Controls for the Heart of the Sun (Waters)

The next track on the live album. Roger Waters did little to help the band shake off the space rock tag when he described the number as being 'about an unknown person who, while piloting a flying saucer, is overcome by suicidal tendencies!' *Set the Controls* was a stage favourite and was frequently performed for cameras in television studios around Europe. Notable appearances include the BBC Omnibus programme *All My Lovin'* and *Samedi et Compagnie* for ORTF1. In the USA the band performed the track for the PBS station, KQED. There were also numerous radio broadcasts but without doubt the best surviving example is the performance in the magnificent ruins of Pompeii where the piece provides an unexpected highlight of the film. *A Saucerful of Secrets* demonstrated that the band had developed this ever evolving musical soundscape over the intervening year and it was now a live pièce de résistance. The reviewer at *Rolling Stone* commented on the great distance the band had covered with the track since the studio recording. He noted that the group, and particularly Wright, had achieved a complexity and a depth, building nuances into the main line of the music, far beyond the studio version.

Sysyphus Parts 1–4 (Wright)

Opens the studio album and represents a significant departure for keyboardist Rick Wright. After the rather uninspired flower-power numbers he had composed for previous records, this serious slice of prog-rock was more indicative of where the band would go in future. Sysyphus was the hero of Greek mythology whose penance was to roll a rock to the top of a mountain, every time he reached

the summit, the gods would cast the stone back down and Sysyphus would have to repeat the task. Here Wright is in positively avant-garde mode, a bizarre piece that owes more to composer John Cage than to rock music, employing a range of instruments and effects from guitar and percussion to piano and, significantly towards the end of the piece a plaintive solo mellotron.

Grantchester Meadows (Waters)

As previously noted *Grantchester Meadows* is the highlight of the studio side of the album – Waters' paean to the eponymous beauty spot south of Cambridge and a meditation on summer and the immensity of nature. The track features a number of sound effects perfectly integrated into the structure of the song – the twittering of a skylark, the honk and splash of a swan landing on the River Cam. The final sequence with the bumblebee being swatted with a newspaper in full stereo by Roger became a great favourite among stoned listeners everywhere.

Several Species of Small Furry Animals Gathered Together in a Cave and Grooving with a Pict (Waters)

Next comes Roger Water's humorous sound collage that suggests Pinky and Perky on acid. Various voices are sped up and slowed down in a series of tape loops (an art form US composer Terry Riley was pioneering at the time), many listeners assumed this track was completed with the assistance of Ron Geesin. Ron certainly was doing similar performance art at the time but he later confirmed he had no direct input into this piece, though he did point out with reference to the ranting Scotsman that both he and Roger had Scottish mothers! Nick Mason, writing almost thirty-five years later finally put the record straight when he acknowledged the Geesin influence.

The Narrow Way Parts 1–3 (Gilmour)

This was David Gilmour's first ever solo composition. It was also

used as an instrumental passage in the live concept the band had been touring throughout the first part of 1969, The Man and The Journey. Unfortunately when he rang up Waters and asked for lyrics, the bassist refused and the resultant recording suffers from Gilmour's lack of confidence in his lyrics, especially in the buried vocal.

The Grand Vizier's Garden Party; Entrance/Entertainment/Exit

(Mason)

The album ends on a rather puzzling and pretty flat note. Despite the portentous titles this piece is little more than an extended nine-minute drum solo by Mason with electronically treated percussion. Anyone who had suffered the album this far in the expectation of some programme music was likely to be severely disappointed, but by this stage most listeners had long since given up the ghost.

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In January 1970 following the release of the album, *Beat Instrumental* interviewed Rick Wright and sought his thoughts on the album 'The four pieces on the LP are very different, though there are pieces in all of them which link together. There wasn't actually any attempt to connect them all. We didn't write together, we just went into the studios on our own to record and then we got together to listen to them. We all played alone on our pieces, in fact. Again, we couldn't all agree on this. I thought it was a very valid experiment and it helped me. The result is that I want to carry on and do it again, on a solo album. But I think that maybe Roger feels that if we'd all worked together, it would have been better. That's something you just don't know, whether it would or not. I think it was a good idea. The live part of the album we had to record twice. The first time, at Mother's in Birmingham, we felt we'd played really well but the equipment didn't work so we couldn't use nearly all of

that one. The second time, at Manchester College of Commerce, was a really bad gig, but as the recording equipment was working well, we had to use it. Parts of the first disc on *Ummagumma* came from the Birmingham gig, which we put together with the Manchester stuff. But the stuff on the album isn't half as good as we can play.'

Chapter 4

ATOM HEART MOTHER

The experimentation of *Ummagumma* was soon recognised as a failure and the album was quickly disowned by the band. Ultimately the endeavour bore fruit with *Atom Heart Mother*. This was the album which gave the band its first UK No. 1. The title track was a bold, innovative piece with a very stylish arrangement for choir and orchestral elements by Ron Geesin. Sadly the group have come to dislike the piece intensely – it is without doubt a work of it's time, but it still has the power to enchant the listener with its unexpected twists and turns.

Side Two of the original vinyl disc is a simpler down to earth affair with the pastoral delights of *If* and *Fat Old Sun* providing

an elegant contrast to the pointless studio noodlings of *Alan's Psychedelic Breakfast*, a track which again underlined the fact that musique concrête needs more than just an intriguing title to make it interesting. Mercifully, this was the band's last foray into sound collage for the sake of it.

Side One was co-written by Ron Geesin, who had become friends with first Nick Mason then Roger Waters. Ron's friendship with Roger was cemented by, of all things, a mutual love of golf, probably the least rock 'n' roll of all pastimes. In addition to the golf there was also a mutual background in architecture, another unusual interest for an aspiring musician. Geesin felt that there was some merit in that particular choice. 'I can sympathise with the view that the architectural background of Roger and Nick shaped the way they created their music. I myself was also put into an architect's office because my father didn't know what to do with me before I left Glasgow, so I've had experience of architecture also, but at a much lower level. I've always thought architecturally, I've always thought in shape and shape and form is the basis of art. Look at Bach, one of the great sound architects.'

By the time the band came to record *Ummagumma* a tiny piece of the Geesin influence had already rubbed off on Roger Waters as Nick Mason recalled some thirty years later when writing his book *Inside Out*, 'Ron had been working on his own for quite some time, so his idiosyncratic techniques and modus operandi were entirely his own. He had interested both Roger and me in home production and his influence can clearly be detected in one element of Roger's contribution to *Ummagumma*, namely *Several Species*.

Despite his minor contribution to the final shape of *Ummagumma*, the music of Pink Floyd as a whole left very little impression on Geesin. Ron has always walked a decidedly idiosyncratic path, and it was no real surprise that his musical tastes did not run to psychedelia. When he was finally exposed to the work of Pink Floyd the main criticism for the music from the veteran

composer appears to have centred around the absence of melody in much of the band's early output. 'I don't remember thinking anything much about their music except a drifting of clouds, a pleasant drifting but not something for me to get off on. I always thought it lacked melody, of course the words, in the Floyd's case, were the melody. You could convert those words into melody in the future one could do that as an artistic exercise or project. What happened then in *Atom Heart Mother* was that because they were kind of exhausted, because of commitments and demands by the manager and EMI Records, they needed some other input. So because I was friends with them all, I was asked to be that input.

'As an artist, I kind of caricatured and parodied a lot of what was going on then. So even when I was kicking about, friends, with the individual members of Pink Floyd, I was gently ribbing them, gently taking the piss, but it was all friendly because I think everyone has to be redressed in a way, everyone has to be bought to some kind of level, doesn't matter who they are. We were just friends and I think they appreciate me for my individuality of thinking and indeed doing. That was the main thing. I didn't see much of Dave Gilmour at that time because he was more of a part of the "rock scene" – a straight musician if you like, as was Rick Wright really. The other two, Nick Mason and Roger Waters were much more out going, more multi-dimensional I suppose. They were looking at shape and form in a social circumstance and in an audio-visual way, not just an audio way, so maybe I related to them much more.'

Despite the commercial success of the Pink Floyd output, by 1970 the band had yet to make a real coherent musical statement. Geesin had certainly got close to the heart of the problem with his observation that Floyd's output lacked melody. There was definitely an emerging Floyd style, but there was, as yet no masterpiece; no show stopper. Pink Floyd had long since given up performing the pop-y Barrett material and were working on epic tracks such as *Set the Controls* and *Careful with That Axe*. Taken as a whole the

material produced a highly satisfying concert experience , but it definitely lacked the twists of melodic genius that would characterise *Meddle* and *Dark Side of the Moon*. The band was still suffering from the loss of their key creative force and even in 1970 was still finding it's feet as a compositional team. The new Floyd had not yet begun to really fly as a creative writing force. *Ummagumma* was at best a patchy affair, but at least as regards the live album it was clear that there was a cohesive approach to making music on stage which centred on the interplay of dynamics and repetition. There was a specific Floyd sound which took time to develop and had its own distinct atmosphere, but they certainly weren't tunes you could hum in the bath.

Although Pink Floyd are today remembered for the brilliance of their work in the studio it's important not to overlook the fact that the band was very much a working touring live unit. This is particularly important when one considers how much of Pink Floyd's output was worked out on the road. It was in the concert hall where emerging new compositions would be tested and refined over a long series of live dates. During this process familiar tracks would often be given working titles. As we have seen *Careful with That Axe* was one example which was originally known as *Murderistic Woman*. In 1970 the band began trying out an extended piece known as *The Amazing Pudding*. Once *The Amazing Pudding* emerged from the development process it had metamorphosed into *Atom Heart Mother* and had gained additional instrumentation in the form of a ten piece brass section and full choir. The piece was performed live by the four piece band on dozens of occasions. In it's full scale incarnation it was transmitted live on the BBC and on the Europa satellite. Regarding live performances, the full scale work was toured extensively in Europe and America. It was also performed live at the Bath Festival where the surviving film footage demonstrates just how difficult it was to get the thing right. *Atom Heart Mother* was an incredibly difficult piece and the studio version that finally

saw the light of day on the album was simply not designed with the live arena in mind. The surviving examples on film and radio both demonstrate the problems synchronising the band with the orchestral elements. As a result of the awkward opening time signature in the introduction the brass in particular tended to sound ragged and undisciplined.

The process of composition that led to the birth of *Atom Heart Mother* seems to have been rather vague with the result that there was also a certain vagueness in the results.

Writing in his book *Inside Out* Nick Mason described the vague genesis of the piece. Clearly the rather woolly approach to creating the music was unlikely to bear any great fruit given the confused beginnings of the work as recalled by Mason. '*Atom Heart Mother* had been assembled during a number of rehearsals. Once we settled on the nucleus of the piece (a theme supplied I think by David), everyone else had contributed, not only musically, but also in devising the overall dynamics. I can't remember now if we had decided to create a longer piece or whether it just snowballed, but it was a way of operating we were starting to feel comfortable with. After some lengthy sessions in early 1970, we had created a very long, rather majestic, but rather unfocused and still unfinished piece. One way to develop such a piece was to play it live, so we played shortened versions, sometimes dubbed *The Amazing Pudding*, at a number of gigs. Gradually we added, subtracted and multiplied the elements, but still seemed to lack an essential something. I think we had always intended to record the track, but the songwriters must have all felt they had hit a specific block, as in the early summer we decided to hand over the music as it existed to Ron Geesin and asked him if he could add some orchestral colour and choral parts.'

The Amazing Pudding was certainly a piece that needed something. There are quite a few surviving recordings of the piece and none really has a great deal to recommend them. In 1970 the band laid down an hour long television special for KQED which

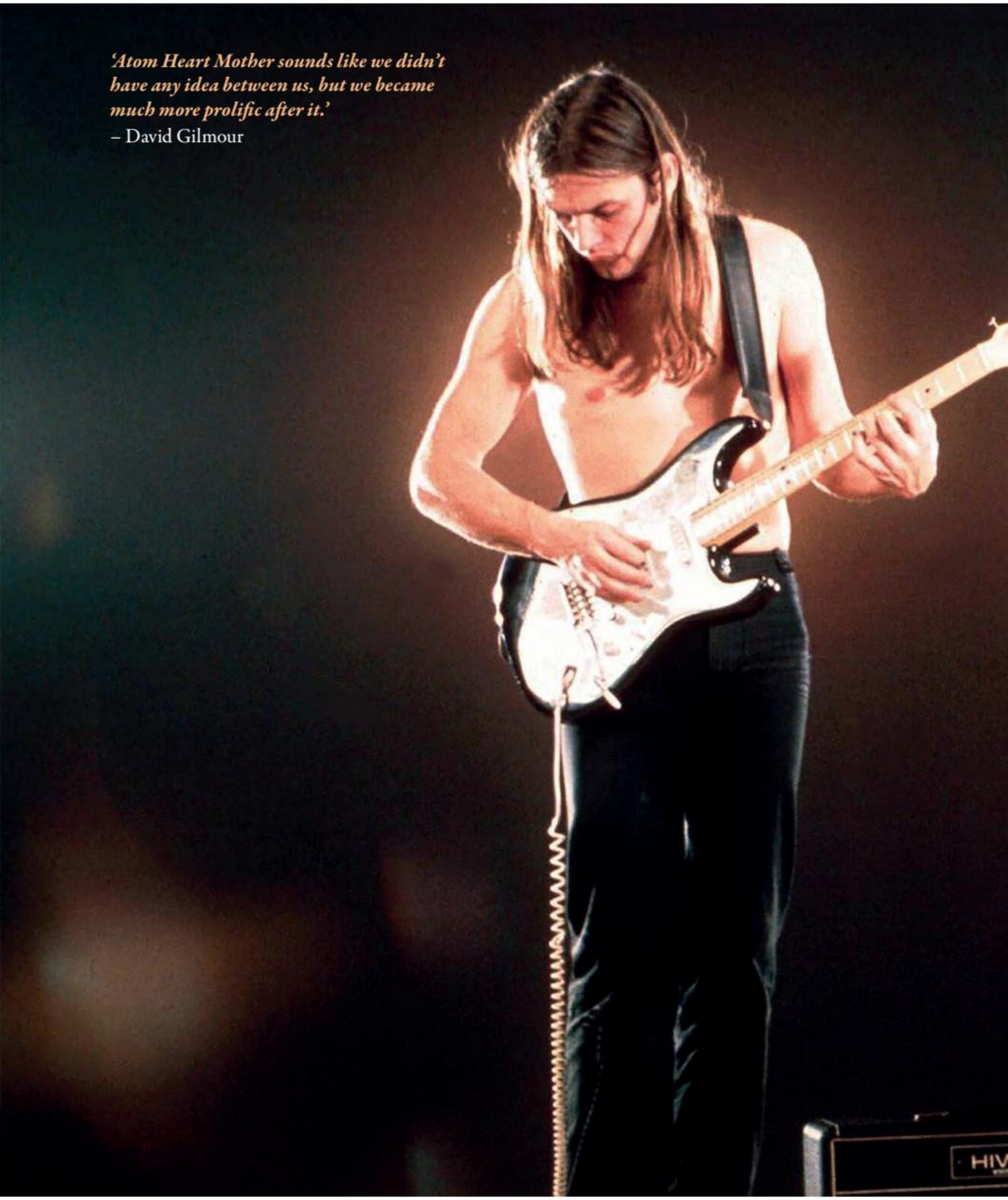
began with a complete performance of *The Amazing Pudding*. It is tempting to over do the culinary metaphors, but let's just say it was at best unappetising and leave it there. The diligent searcher will also have come across a DVD version of Floyd performing *Atom Heart Mother* which purports to have been recorded at the Hakon Festival. In reality it is actually the sound from the 1970 Montreux performance cut to pictures of the Japanese performance shot by the promoters. The audio performance is much better than many from the time, but the effect is spoiled by the clandestine long lens shots of the accompanying visuals which clearly do not match the performance on stage.

Nick Mason's hunch that Ron Geesin was right for the project proved to be correct. For his part Geesin also agreed with Nick's general impression that the piece lacked form. Much later Ron Geesin recalled the process of beginning to bring some sense of order to the proceedings. 'It was Roger who actually suggested to me that I should help Floyd with their next album. He proposed the idea that I should write the brass and choir pieces. Floyd were off to the States then, and Roger left me with a skeleton tape of rhythm and chords. Nobody had a clear idea of what was wanted, they didn't read music and didn't have to, so it was never an easy musical dialogue. The group was mostly receptive to my ideas. There were murmuring and frowns and puzzlement at times, but rather like the way I had to accept their tape, they had to accept what I did because none of them could write music and I could only write it very slowly. I was only one page ahead in the book really from that point of view.'

This last statement by Ron seems a little unfair to Rick who was the band's resident musical theorist, having studied keyboards and trombone before joining the nascent Pink Floyd while a student at architectural college. Bored of life as a trainee architect Rick left and enrolled at music college before finally joining Floyd full time, so the keyboardist at least was well grounded in musical theory. *Summer '68* demonstrates Rick's own skills for brass arrangement.

In any event the piece that ultimately became *Atom Heart Mother* had by now been performed many times on the road. With a structure now beginning to take shape it was time to really get down to work in the recording studio which was once again EMI's Abbey Road now something of a second home for the band. It proved eventful to say the least, as Nick Mason recalled in *Inside Out*... 'Unfortunately, *Atom Heart Mother* is twenty-four minutes long. Roger and I embarked on what can only be described as an Odyssean voyage to record the backing track. In order to keep tracks free for the overdubs we had bass and drums on two tracks, and the whole recording had to be done in one pass. Playing the piece without any instruments meant that getting through it without mistakes demanded the full range of our limited musicianship; matters such as tempo had to be left in abeyance. The delights of quantising – using computers to digitally adjust tempos without affecting pitch – were still some twenty years in the future.'

Once this preliminary process had been completed the band handed the tapes to Ron Geesin and went off to tour America. Working from the tapes supplied, Geesin scratched his head for a while before he finally took the plunge and got down to work. He later recalled the creation of the piece: 'The recording process for *Atom Heart Mother* was a collage. They had five or six little sections that they had recorded at EMI Abbey Road, of what I call a backing track. It was quite a thick texture but it was a backing track. They had then stuck these together, as you do with magnetic tape. They'd come up with a tape which was an accompaniment tape lasting twenty-three minutes and they gave me a rough mix of that tape, and we had some discussions about what might go on it. They said they wanted a big sound, they wanted a choir section here and probably some kind of louder, raucous section here, possibly brass, and we had a very short session, and I'm talking a morning and another bit of an afternoon somewhere, where Rick Wright came round to my studio in Ladbroke Grove, London and we looked at the choir



'Atom Heart Mother sounds like we didn't have any idea between us, but we became much more prolific after it.'
– David Gilmour

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section. He suggested maybe some notes, but there was nothing written down for the choir at that time and then Dave came round with a sort of arpeggio, which in Italian, means "steps". It wasn't a melody, it was a pattern and he suggested that for what was in fact the opening, the main theme. The rest of it was me. It's a concoction, an assembly. The tapes of the sections were stuck together. Because they were stuck together and they didn't have the energy or time to re-do them, because they were off on tour, I remember those little briefing sessions happened and then they were off to America or some other place, the speeds were all wrong. When you're moving through a piece you know when it should speed up and when it should slow down. In fact the reverse happened with some of the sections. When they stuck the sessions together they didn't actually really work, so my job was to craft something sensible on top of this rather cobbled collage or montage and make it look like it was working. To me that's craft, not art, although we could have a long discussion about the relationship between craft and art. The art bit was getting a couple of melodies that really worked and I believe that the opening theme melody really works and the cello melody really works. They are entirely out of my head, except as I say, Dave doing a little arpeggio piece. So we had the cobbled together tapes, which was the best they could do at the time, given the restraints of time and energy. My job was to make something sensible on the top so as not to appear like it was the same as the joins that they had made. I consider that to be a crafting process, not particularly an art process, but the art is in the making of original melodies and structures.'

As we have seen, the album was recorded in a very curious way, with Nick and Roger laying down the whole of the twenty-odd minutes of backing track in a single take. To obtain a result from this unusual way of working certainly requires someone with a particular approach to music. More than thirty years on, Nick Mason writing in *Inside Out*, remains highly complimentary concerning Geesin and his work. 'Ron Geesin is a talented musician and arranger, as well

as a virtuoso performer on banjo and harmonium, when his style might best be described as ragtime poetry on speed. The good news was that with Ron at the helm, it was unlikely that we'd end up with "The London Symphonic Philharmonia Plays Pink Floyd". Ron set to work on our piece, and with little further input from us, he arrived at Abbey Road armed with a sheaf of scores ready to record. He immediately ran up against a major hurdle. The session players balked at being directed by Ron, whom they perceived as belonging to the world of rock music. As Ron waved his baton hopefully, they made as much trouble as they could. Ron had not only written some technically demanding parts, but the phrasing he wanted was unusual. The musicians hated this even more. With microphones open they knew every comment would be noted and their discreet laughter, clock-watching, and constant interruptions of "Please sir, what does this mean?" Meant that recording was at a standstill, the chances of Ron being had up on a manslaughter charge increased logarithmically by the second.'

Ron himself has never made any secret of the problems encountered during the recording process by a young and fairly inexperienced composer finding himself confronted with the grizzled veterans hardened by years of session work. 'I didn't choose whether to use or not use anything. Pink Floyd and EMI Records dictated the limits and how there would have been so many session players etc. The brass players were session players, EMI-type of session players, who were of a high quality but not to my standards of best orchestral players. I had been doing very tiny pieces before in TV commercials and short films, where I used sections of the Philharmonic Orchestra of London. The whole of the trumpet section I used for one. Now I would have booked them in like a shot because they would have known how to interpret the piece just right but the players that were on *Atom Heart Mother* were rather hard. Brass players are known to be rather hard and it's been told already in some books that I had a bit of a go at a horn player because he

was mouthing off. He could see that I was nervous because I didn't have much experience of directing professional musicians. I knew a lot about how to make a good form, but not about directing. So he could see this and that suited him to have a bit of a go and I said "Another word from you mate and I'm over there." And in the box they're all going "Christ Almighty – Ron's lost it!" So I had to be taken off doing the conducting bit, which, to be honest, I wasn't best suited to because I was green, I was definitely a new boy with all these well-worn session players. So it was a tense moment. So that was why John Aldiss, the choirmaster, was asked to conduct the rest of the whole session and I just sat at the side and said "You want a bit more punch into that", or, "Do this". I actually pretty well cracked up, due to the strain of working. I'd done a lot of work that year – films, an album, so I was ready for a bit of a rest so he took over. But the main point about him taking over was that he, as a classically trained person, didn't have that punchy drive that a Duke Ellington, standing up in front of the band would have had, and I really needed that kind of direction. If I could have held on for a bit or gone and had a breather for a couple of days, I would have done it and it would have been punchier. The delivery of the brass section was a bit woolly for me but it worked. And it may have been more suitable for the Pink Floyd cloud-drifting aspect. But that's the fact of it.'

Overall the recording process was very far from smooth, which inevitably affected the results. To Nick Mason it seemed as if it was one problem after another, even the introduction of new technology was to prove a hindrance rather than a help as he later recalled in *Inside Out*. 'This was not his only problem. At the time the piece was recorded EMI had just taken delivery of the latest in recording technology, the eight-track Studer recorders. These utilised one-inch-wide tape, and with admirable caution EMI issued a directive that no edits were to be done on this, as they were worried about the quality of the splicing.' Naturally all of this made things rather

difficult for a band for whom cutting and re-cutting tape had become a way of life particularly when it came to the inclusion of the sound effects as Geesin later recalled. 'There's the motorbike and the electronic area and a train. They used a lot of sound effects in those days. They weren't pioneers of ambient music or found objects stuck together because some of the American classical electronic music composers had done that before, so the Floyd were borrowing some of those techniques, but they work very well and I've always said that Roger Waters was a grand master at timing. He was not a great bass player, he didn't need to be. His art is in timing and in knowing exactly what is required and when. Although the piece as a whole is still a pleasant curiosity the timing is most definitely out. There's the famous case of the lost beat where I had written a whole section thinking that beat one was on a certain beat, reading from the tape, but when Nick Mason saw that and we got to the session – this was a choir section – he said "No, beat one's not there, it's one beat back," so he said "you'll have to move everything one beat back." I said "No, why not take that as one beat, it's only where the bar lines are written on the score" – I didn't have the time to go away and overnight move the bar lines one beat because that's what you'd have to do. The phrasing's all correct for what was in the backing, which was an off-beat punchy section. It's the funky section. So no-one has ever heard that section as I wrote it and that's something that could be done in the future. Put that section back and in fact, I was talking to the Italians, who have not yet been able to do this piece, about doing it and making the whole thing longer and bigger – in other words more performers. And actually doing that section, doing the backing twice and have the choir section moved on for one beat, for once through, and in the original position for the second time through. I don't know if that would ever happen.'

It will come as no surprise to the alert reader to discover that these unpromising factors conspired together to further reduce the chances of achieving an acceptable result. This was confirmed by

Nick Mason writing in *Inside Out*. 'Sure enough the finished piece lacked the metronomic timekeeping that would have made life easier for everyone. Instead the rhythm track accelerated and then lurched back to the correct tempo in a volatile fashion that Ron now had to take into account. The day was saved by John Aldiss, the choirmaster, whose disciplined classical choir had (it must be noted) a far more positive attitude and plenty of experience of dealing with orchestras. With their unruffled help, the recording was completed. However, there was another problem we were unaware of at the time. We had been forced to supply relatively high levels of backing track to the orchestra of monitor speakers, some of which had been picked up by their microphones. This in-erasable spill forever ensured that *Atom Heart Mother* lacked the sonic clarity we have always strived for.'

Although he was under considerable pressure, Geesin was aware of the below par aspects of the work and despite all of the trials and tribulations would willingly have put himself through the whole ordeal again. 'Because of all these non-perfections, I said to Steve O'Rourke, the manager, after the recording session had finished "Well that was a good rehearsal, can we do it for real now?" That was never to be. The money had run out, the energy had run out. EMI said we've got to get it out. The speed fluctuations would all have been put right but there was no energy there. Reality prevailed. On the whole it's not a bad little number. It's rather obvious, but it was all that could be done with the material and confinements.' Ron Geesin also confirmed the origins of the title which today sounds somewhat grand and portentous but the truth is all rather prosaic. 'We were sitting in the control room and John Peel had his newspaper, the *Evening Standard*, and we were sitting round with Nick, Roger and the others. I think they were all there saying, "We haven't got a title for this," and I said, "If you look in there you'll find a title,' and then Roger picked up the paper and said, "atomic heart mother" and the others said, "Yeah, that sounds good."'

A track-by-track review of

Atom Heart Mother

Released 2 October 1970

For the sleeve of *Atom Heart Mother* Hipgnosis took an everyday image and by the excellence of the art direction turned it into something strange and disconcerting. This was the first sleeve which carried neither the name nor any other form of visual reference to the band which served to underline the enigmatic qualities of the sleeve. The sleeve has been described as being 'totally cow' and who are we to argue?

Atom Heart Mother (Mason/Gilmour/Waters/Wright/Geesin)

Whatever the band may now think this piece is definitely worth revisiting. Based around a theme which was designed to evoke the atmosphere of a western movie, the piece moves effortlessly through a range of contrasting moods and styles. The playing is superb and the music is by turns both melodic and atonal. The choral section is particularly inspired with the rhythmic qualities of the unformed words harnessed to great effect. The piece is now openly despised by the band and although that may well be justified in the case of *Ummagumma* there are certainly enough plus points in *Atom Heart Mother* to merit a re-evaluation by both it's creators and the listening public.

If (Waters)

Side Two of the album was much easier to record and it is an altogether different experience. It opens with *If*, the first of two tracks by Roger Waters. This is a gentle bucolic sounding piece in the same pastoral vein as *Grantchester Meadows* from *Ummagumma*. Gentle, reflective and unchallenging it provides a total contrast to the breathless hustle and bustle of the first side. If can be described

'Sometimes I play something, and I haven't recorded it, and I don't know where it came from, why my hands did what they did, what key it was in, anything.'
– Rick Wright

as one of the last echoes of the pastoral Pink Floyd which had blossomed briefly on the *More* soundtrack with gentle tracks like *Cymbeline*. *Julia Dream* is another good example as is *Grantchester Meadows* from *Ummagumma*. By now the band clearly felt that this gentle bucolic style had run its course and *If* was destined to be something of a swansong for the acoustic mellow Floyd sound. Despite the gentle mood of the music the lyrics are much darker, full of self-analytical imagery and self doubt like, 'If I was a man I'd talk with you more often' – the first suggestion that Waters would make an art out of his own self-loathing.

Summer of '68 (Wright)

An unusual piece written by Rick Wright which feels like a very British slice of late sixties pop music complete with a rather snappy brass arrangement, often overlooked and never played on stage this is the forgotten moment of the album, but it is a very pleasant track which surprises the listener in its own very English unprepossessing way.

Fat Old Sun (Gilmour)

Next up came *Fat Old Sun*, another understated piece, but one which has nonetheless become something of a favourite among the Floyd fraternity. Clearly the band had exhausted their stocks of creativity at this point and Nick Mason later recalled the difficulty the band had in bringing forth new music at a time when the studio experience seemed to be 'endless.' It appeared that the threat of being incarcerated in Abbey Road for life, with no chance of parole, was sufficient to galvanise even the most reticent songwriters to perform. *Fat Old Sun* utilised the same chord structure as the main piece but the similarity ends there. This is another piece of what Geesin would term 'drifting'. The listener is transported effortlessly along on an undemanding journey into the sunset. The quality of the song is enhanced by the effect of Rick Wright's sweet harmony vocal

intertwined with Gilmour's equally smooth voice. Gilmour always seems to sound at the very limits of his vocal ability, there is a real fragile quality to the Gilmour vocal and this song is no exception. The only tension which comes from the piece is the listener wondering if Gilmour will be able to hold it all together. A rare live recording of the piece by the BBC surfaced on *Top Gear*.

Alan's Psychedelic Breakfast (Waters/Mason/Gilmour/Wright)
Side Two of the album closes with one of the more famous Floyd tracks though one suspects it is as a result of its unusual title as much as for its unusual musical content. The Floyd were often criticised for being po-faced but here was more mischievous humour, based on a thing they sometimes did live where the front rows of the audience would be treated to the sound and smell of bacon and eggs sizzling on a cooker on stage. A mixture of music, sound effects (the dripping tap at the end ran right on to the run-out grooves on original vinyl copies) and mumbled spoken word – at one point a list of favourite breakfast dishes is mumbled in a rather stoned voice by the character of the title, roadie Alan Styles. Roger Waters explained the development of the piece in an interview with *Sounds* from October 1970. 'It was the usual thing of an idea coming out of the fact that we'd almost finished an LP but not quite and we needed another so many minutes. We were all frantically trying to write songs, and initially I thought of just doing something on the rhythm of a dripping tap, then it turned into this whole kitchen thing. On the record it's a carefully set up stereo picture of a kitchen with somebody coming in, opening a window, filling a kettle and putting it on the stove. But instead of the gas lighting, there's a chord, so he strikes a match and there's another chord, and so on until it finally goes into a piece of music. The logistics of doing it live are quite difficult – we can't obviously take a set of a kitchen round with us and do it all, but we'll have to have some table arrangement to fry eggs on and boil kettles and everything.'

One of the most controversial aspects of the album was the packaging. In stark contrast to the dramatic roller-coaster of the music the cover was filled with a simple unadorned image of a cow in a field. Writing in *Inside Out* Nick Mason recalled the feathers which were being ruffled at EMI Records. 'Storm remembers that when he showed the cover to EMI, one of the executives screamed at him, "Are you mad? Do you want to destroy this record company?" With the album at long last in the can and an innovative promotional campaign ready to swing into action it was finally time to allow the British public to form their own judgement. The response was overwhelmingly positive and the album unexpectedly rose to No. 1 in the UK album charts. Ron Geesin had certainly not expected the album to do so well and had not even insisted on a co-writers credit on the sleeve of the album. 'Yes, I was definitely surprised by the commercial success. That was a surprise, when I'd slaved away for years at projects and not got much obvious return or reward. We're talking spiritual reward here – not just money, so it was a great surprise and nice. But I'll never understand why they did not put my name on the cover, or at least give me a proper acknowledgement. It's on as a composer credit. To me that also showed the part of the Floyd that not too many people know, which is the giant money-making machine. It gradually grew on me that I should have had credit for that because from my career point of view it would have helped a bit and it would probably have stopped me from the rather galling activity of self-publicity. I should just be playing stuff and making my art without having to say "I did that."'

Despite the complexity of the piece the band were undaunted by the prospect of taking the piece on the road, but it was still not something to be taken lightly as David Gilmour confirmed in an interview given in 1970 when the band was preparing to take the show over to America. 'Something on the scale of *Atom Heart Mother* really takes a lot of getting together. The problem is that we've never done it more than twice with the same people. The

choir is usually all right because they're used to working together, but some of the brass people have been really hopeless. We had problems with the sound equipment, getting it miked up and balanced and stuff. The trouble was also not having enough rehearsal time everywhere we did it, because we used a different brass and choir group in Europe than the one we used on the East Coast, and another one on the West Coast. So we used three completely different sets of people performing it. We tried to hire musicians from local symphonies, if possible. Often we couldn't get them all from local symphonies, so we'd just get session musicians. We found our conductor, Peter Phillips, by coming over and looking for someone a couple of months before the tour...'

The results of the live performances were highly variable ranging from mediocre to diabolical. Geesin found the live experience excruciating. 'From what little I saw of them, I hated the live performances. The brass and choir were not up to live performing, the conductor did all he could to keep the thing together but it was pretty ragged and I know that I left Hyde Park in tears and I don't know what went on in America. I could stand seeing *Atom Heart Mother* performed again but only properly and that means re-instating the original missing beat in the funky section and enlarge the choir by a factor of ten, from twenty to two hundred and probably the brass from ten to at least double, so there would be two instruments on each.'

It was not just *Atom Heart Mother* which presented difficulties in respect of possible live performances. On 3 June 1972 *New Musical Express* published an interview with Rick Wright in which he explored the difficulties presented by other tracks on the album.

'We have had difficulties. For example, *Alan's Psychedelic Breakfast* we tried on our English tour and it didn't work at all, so we had to give it up. None of us liked doing it, anyway, and we didn't like it on the album. It's rather pretentious. It doesn't do anything. Quite honestly, it's a bad number. A similar idea, in that idiom, we did at

Roundhouse another time, I thought was much better. Practically on the spot, we decided to improvise a number where we fried eggs on stage and Roger threw potatoes about, and it was spontaneous, and it was really good. *Alan's Breakfast* was a weak number. We don't have that much problem producing things on stage. We work on our four instruments, which is all we have on stage, and adapt accordingly.'

Chapter 5

MEDDLE

For all of it's supposed faults *Atom Heart Mother* had finally produced the breakthrough that had been threatened for so long. The task now was to consolidate their new found position as commercial and artistic heavy weights. As well as their status, the word heavy could equally be applied to Roger Water's state of mind. Long before the angst-ridden albums that appeared later in the decade, Waters gave a glimpse of the factors that came to characterise the man as an artist in a 9 October 1971 *Melody Maker* interview. 'I work to keep my mind off a doomy situation. All over the globe, it gets crazier every day. And the craziness seems to be accelerating at a fantastic rate. But it might just be

that, as you get older, your perception gets faster, until the whole thing seems unreal.'

The next album had to be a major step forward and the band were all too aware of the pressure. They rose to the challenge magnificently and the result was *Meddle,* which marked a huge leap forward in compositional terms and also in the contributions and performances from the individual members of the band collectively. Three highly significant factors simultaneously came into play to ensure that *Meddle* would be an outstanding album. It was highly significant that Roger Waters had at last blossomed as a lyricist. As a result the lyrics of *Echoes* are mature, confident and meaningful. The point of transformation in *Echoes* is particularly well handled with a magnificent economy of language and a strong poetic sense which was to develop strongly from here onwards.

'Strangers passing in the street
By chance two separate glances meet
And I am you and what I see is me.'

These three brilliant lines can almost be viewed as the moment when Waters finally emerged as a fully formed lyricist. From this point onwards there was no stopping the man that went on to become recognised as one of the greatest wordsmiths in rock. It is also in *Echoes* that we see the first use of the device of repetition in Water's lyrics.

The most effective use of this particular technique would be shortly unveiled in *Eclipse* where it is used to best effect, but we see it first in *Echoes* where the receptiveness of the lyrics blends wonderfully with the music to create a stunning tour de force. As the great cyclical theme soars upwards it is propelled by the repetitive pattern of the unforgiving lyric

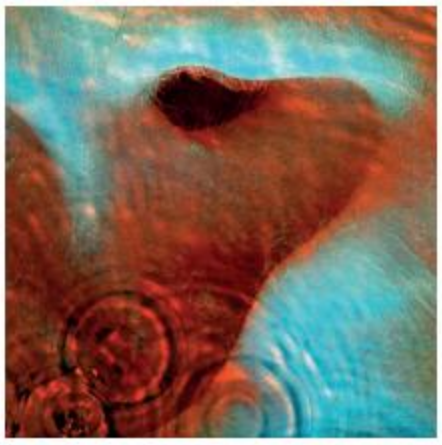
'And no-one calls us to move on
And no-one forces down our eyes
And no-one speaks and no-one tries
An no-one flies around the sun.'

Just as Waters was developing his craft, so too was David Gilmour who had also had time to mature as an artist. Gilmour now boasted his own distinctive guitar technique and we are first introduced to this new found mastery on *Echoes*. It was certainly not a style of playing based on technical wizardry with lightning fast fretboard runs of Jimmy Page or Ritchie Blackmore, but Floyd were never judged by the number of notes played. Like a master craftsman, Gilmour's great skill lay in an amazing ability to select the perfect note at the perfect time, and *Meddle* was the first evidence of his new found confidence on the instrument. As a band Floyd had taken on board the hard earned lessons of *Atom Heart Mother* and they were now a highly experienced studio recording ensemble constantly seeking out new and innovative ways to enhance the sound of their recordings. Nothing was sacrosanct or too unlikely to be worth trying.

Most important of all however, the Floyd collectively had finally flowered as composers of outstanding melodies. To date the Floyd albums had demonstrated a mastery of dynamics but had consistently lacked the sublime melodies that came to characterise their later work. Much of the *Meddle* album is still very much rooted in the mid-tempo four beats in the bar that Floyd favoured. However, where earlier albums had relied heavily on repeated patterns with varying loud and soft passages, *Meddle* was constructed around the sublime melodies of *Echoes*, the stand out track of the album. Although both albums differ radically in form, in retrospect *Meddle* owes a great deal of its success to the band's work with Ron Geesin on *Atom Heart Mother*. It was on the previous album that the Floyd had first discovered how even the most unpromising piece could be transformed when the stylistic hallmarks of the Floyd sound were married to really strong expansive melodies for the first time in their career. The success of the huge main theme of *Atom Heart Mother* and the haunting cello section were reflected in the sales of the album which had pushed a Floyd release to No. 1 for the

first time. These lessons were swiftly learned and adapted for *Echoes,* which proved to be the first major composition from the band itself that measured up to every musical standard. With *Meddle*, and *Echoes* in particular, Pink Floyd demonstrated that the group had learned how to take the innovative sound effects that the band had made their own and weave them together with the music to create a seamless blend which was to become synonymous with Pink Floyd. The results are best seen in *Echoes* which is still a classic slice of Floyd today.

One of These Days is another masterpiece that succeeds in blending sound effects into the music to create a unified whole. The band were keen to unveil their work as soon as possible and gave strong performances, including one on the BBC *Top Gear* show. This hard earned skill, developed over the previous four albums, became a hallmark of the Pink Floyd sound of the future. This is the record that finally began to define Pink Floyd's image and sound. As we have seen, *Atom Heart Mother* represents the transition point at which, with Ron Gessin's help, Pink Floyd finally managed to marry strong melody to their dynamic ideas. *Meddle* represents the moment when the Floyd discovered the ability to create melody for themselves. From this point on, the band would never look back. In an article published on 11 December 1971 in *Disc and Music Echo* magazine David Gilmour set out his views on the mood of the music created for *Meddle*. 'We're really making emotional music. I wouldn't say it's intellectual. In England it's different. We can do anything we like, really. We've often gone onstage and done material that we've never done before and the audiences are used to us and they love it. But in the States, it's more or less like we have to play our hits. At the concert, the crowd yelled for Pink Floyd to play *Astronomy Domine* and *See Emily Play*, to which Rogers replied, 'You must be joking!"



A track-by-track review of

Meddle

Released 31 October 1971

This was the second sleeve to feature an image without a reference to the band. This time the image was seemingly abstract but on closer inspection resolved itself to be an ear under water. With *Atom Heart Mother* already having gone to number one in the UK, EMI were in no position to argue, and the trend was set to continue.

One of These Days (Waters/Wright/Mason/Gilmour)

The album opens with *One of These Days*, a group collaboration credited jointly to all four members. So named because everything was going wrong in the studio the day they recorded this piece (AIR studios January 1971). *One of These Days* builds into a furious space rocker with great use of Mason's backwards recorded cymbals. The hugely impressive bass sound is actually achieved by using two bass guitars played through the Binson echo unit. The second of the double tracked basses is actually played by David Gilmour following Roger Waters' lead a bar behind. Nick Mason's is the treated voice saying 'One of these days I'm going to cut you into little pieces.'

A Pillow of Winds (Waters/Gilmour)

This number takes the form of a restrained, ethereal, predominantly acoustic ballad written by Waters/Gilmour that makes ample use of a wind machine. This is a classic Floyd lyric, which follows a daily cycle in human life: bedtime, sleep, dreaming and rising to greet another day. The song itself is one of the more disposable moments in the Pink Floyd cannon and does not appear to have been played live on stage.

'You take the risk of being rejected. If you have pretensions to be an artist of any kind, you have to take the risk of people rejecting you and thinking you're an arsehole.'

– Roger Waters

Fearless (*Waters/Gilmour*)
Composed jointly by Roger Waters and David Gilmou, *Fearless* is a piece that seems to presage the themes of the next album with references to someone who could well evolve into Syd in lines like 'fearlessly the idiot faced the crowd'. The Floyd play off the song's strong melody line against the recorded sounded of Liverpool FC fans on the Anfield Kop, chanting their anthem *You'll Never Walk Alone*.

San Tropez (Waters)
A cocktail jazz paean to the French resort beloved of the jet set and Hollywood stars. The Floyd were frequent visitors to the French Riviera and the Mediterranean. However many fans regard this as the worst Floyd track of all time.

Seamus (Waters/Wright/Mason/Gilmour)
A short throwaway acoustic blues written about a dog whose whining and barks are part of the lead vocals throughout. A Floydian joke that seemed funny to the band but ultimately backfired. Seamus was a real-life mutt that belonged to Humble Pie's Steve Marriott – the connection being his band mate Jerry Shirley who played with Dave Gilmour in Jokers Wild and also appeared at Gilmour's invitation on the *Barrett* album. When Steve was on tour in the summer of 1970 Syd and his girlfriend apparently looked after Seamus at Marriott's house in Essex!

Echoes (Waters/Gilmour/Mason/Wright)
The whole of Side Two is dedicated to the group composition *Echoes*, which has been described by Roger Waters as 'an epic sound poem'. With this piece the Floyd shifted their direction from outer space to the world above and beneath the ocean waves. The lyrics abound with references to Albatrosses and choral caves, the eerie sound of a repeated submarine ASDIC bleep. With Floyd finally unchaining

the keys to the melody cabinet this is a bleakly beautiful and darkly terrifying piece, especially famous for the middle sequence with its myriad of sound effects such as crows cawing. The number started out as a single note played on the piano by Wright and then put through a microphone and a Leslie cabinet. Parts of the track were also used as the soundtrack to the *Crystal Voyager* surfing movie.

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Michael Watts was given the job of reviewing the album for the respected British music journal *Melody Maker* which duly published his review in November 1971. Unfortunately Mr Watts found little to cheer about and his piece was entitled 'Pink's Muddled Meddle' which gives something of the flavour of the following critical ire. 'One can't help but feel that Pink Floyd are so much sound and fury, signifying nothing. Their achievement has been to create a space rock sound, which revolves around the use of electronic effects combined with the usual musical instrumentation of four-piece rock bands, i. e. drums, guitar, bass and organ. Frequently, they have utilized this concept to good effect, right from the early days of *Interstellar Overdrive* and *Astronomy Domine* to the *Atom Heart Mother* and *Ummagumma* albums, but how much of this, in fact, has been pure effect? Stripped of the sense of etherea, the music hardly stands up as more than competent rhythmic rock, while even the use of electronics and spacey atmospherics is not as adventurous as it may seem at first hearing, especially when considered alongside such as *Zero Times* by Tonto's Expanding Head Band.

'*Meddle* exhibits all their faults, as well as their most successful points. The first side is taken up with songs, as opposed to long instrumental pieces, and it's in this area that they most expose themselves to criticism. Since Syd Barrett left, there has been no one in the band able to cope with the sort of pithy statement that is necessary to the five-minute pop track, which undoubtedly explains

why they have ceased to work to the single format. The vocals verge on the drippy, and the instrumental work-outs, which rely heavily on Dave Gilmour's guitar, are decidedly old hat. Listen to *One of These Days*; it's a throwback to *Telstar* by the Tornados. The second side, *Echoes*, is the one where the concept comes in. It encompasses the whole side, starts off with a passage of Asdic pings and lots of soaring guitar before settling into a genuinely funky organ riff, and then there is introduced some wind effects and the sound of cawing rooks (or it could be cows; that's how it comes across). It follows on with some beautiful cello set against further use of the Asdic, before the whole piece crashes out in a crescendo of volume and rattling cymbals. Far out, you may say. Not really. Although there appears to be some continuity in the work – the Asdic echoes, get it? – my basic impression was of a series of effects without any underlying depth. Interesting, even aesthetic, they may be, but superficial ultimately, like background noise in a Radio Three play. When there is little real musical substance to sustain those effects, how can the result be anything but a soundtrack to a non-existent movie?'

On 19 February 1972 *New Musical Express* published a far more positive interview with Nick Mason, in which he explored the relationship between *Atom Heart Mother* and *Meddle*. 'Yes, I think there are similarities between *Atom Heart Mother* and *Meddle*. I don't think we could have done *Meddle* without doing *Atom Heart Mother*.' As to whether the construction of the two pieces was very similar, Mason considered, 'You're obviously right about the construction. There are various things that have a Pink Floyd flavour, but are also very dangerous Pink Floyd clichés. One is the possible tendency to get stuck into a sort of slow four tempo. And the other thing is to take a melody line, or the chorus, or something, and flog it to death. Maybe we'll play it once slow and quiet, the next time a bit harder, third time really heavy, which tends to come a little bit into *Meddle* and in *Atom Heart Mother*. But it's slightly more forgivable with the choir and orchestra because it's nice building an orchestra

and bringing in extra brass and playing more complex lines. There are various sections on *Atom Heart Mother* that I'm very happy with. I love the choir section, both the singing and the spoken choir section. The constructing of *Echoes* is rather similar in terms of it running through various movements. But the movements are so different that I don't feel that we've had to milk *Atom Heart Mother* to produce *Echoes*. *Echoes* was a specific attempt to sort of do something by a slightly different method. What we did, in fact, was book a studio for January, and throughout January we went in and played. Anytime that anyone had any sort of rough idea of something, we would put it down. At the end of January, we listened back and we'd got thirty-six different bits and pieces that sometimes cross-related and sometimes didn't. *Echoes* was made up from that.'

Pink Floyd may have been pleased with their output on *Atom Heart Mother* but true greatness was just around the corner. This came in the form of *The Dark Side of the Moon*, the release that propelled the band to super-stardom. Read the behind-the-scenes story of the making of this classic album in the next issue of Music Legends Special Editions – *The Dark Side of the Moon*.

PINK FLOYD

1968-1971

MUSIC LEGENDS